

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 3, 2013

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## **Arkansas Legislature: Bill Proposing Moratorium On School Mergers Advances (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)**

LITTLE ROCK — The House Education Committee endorsed legislation Tuesday that would impose a two-year moratorium on school mergers based on student enrollment.

The panel rejected a bill that would provide state-funded vouchers for students to attend public or private schools of their choice.

Both bills are sponsored by Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville.

House Bill 1938 passed on a voice vote despite testimony against the measure from Attorney General Dustin McDaniel and the commissioner of the state Department of Education. It goes to the House.

Testifying in a committee room that was packed with spectators, including adults and children in shirts bearing the name of the group Arkansas Parents for School Choice, Alexander said he disagrees with the state law requiring schools that fall below 350-student enrollment for two consecutive years to merge with one or more nearby districts.

Alexander pointed to the example of the Weiner School District, which was annexed into the Harrisburg district in 2010 because of low enrollment. He said Weiner was never in fiscal or academic distress.

“We’re being asked to believe a theoretical model instead of our lying eyes,” Alexander said. “This argument is frankly ridiculous on its face. If a school is actually in financial or academic distress and does not respond to reasonable intervention, we have no problem with that school being closed.”

The bill would bar the state Board of Education from approving school mergers through April 30, 2015, for reasons other than academic or fiscal distress, or for failure to comply with state accreditation standards. It would give the House and Senate education committees the option to extend the moratorium through Dec. 31, 2016.

The legislation would mandate a study in the interim of administrative reorganizations and student transportation in selected school districts.

A 2012 law required the state Department of Education and school districts that received students through mergers to develop a plan to track the educational progress of all students from the affected

district, as well as specific subgroups including at-risk students, economically disadvantaged students and those from major racial and ethnic groups.

HB 1938 would require the state Bureau of Legislative Research, in conjunction with Education Department and Division of Public School Facilities and Transportation, to conduct a study of student transportation in districts selected by the education committees to assess how the time and cost of school transportation for students can or should be minimized within districts.

McDaniel reminded the committee that the 350-student threshold was a product of the state's efforts to resolve the long-running Lake View lawsuit over school funding in which the state Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that the state was not adequately and equitably funding public schools.

In 2007, the court ruled that adequacy had been met — approving legislative actions that included reforms, spending hikes and the 350-student minimum.

McDaniel and state Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell warned that the state likely would end up back in court if Alexander's bill were to become law. Kimbrell said the state already has been sued by one district, Deer-Mount Judea, which alleges that the state has not been adequately funding the district since its student population dropped below 500.

Alexander said after the hearing, "I would like to have an attorney general that, when we're challenged in court on something that clearly we have the right to do, they would say, 'Bring it on.'"

Alexander's HB 1897 — the proposed Parental Choice Scholarship Program Act — failed on a voice vote. Under the bill, state per-student funding in an amount that the resident school district receives would follow the child to any participating public, charter, magnet, alternative or private school of the parent or guardian's choice.

Students would be eligible to participate in the program until they received a high school diploma or reach age 21 under the measure.

The bill would bar the state from imposing any additional regulations upon participating private schools, and would specifically forbid state interference with the right of private schools to hire only staff whose beliefs are consistent with their religious values and practice.

State Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell testified against both bills.

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### **School-district petition formed (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Supporters of a proposed Jacksonville/North Pulaski school district initiated a petition drive Tuesday calling for the Arkansas Board of Education to schedule an election that would establish a new district out of a portion of the Pulaski County Special School District.

Daniel Gray, a spokesman for the Jacksonville/North Pulaski Education Corps organization, introduced the petition for the election at a forum attended by about 200 at the Jacksonville Community Center.

Petition signatures from a minimum of 10 percent of registered voters living within the boundaries of the proposed school district - which could be about 2,000 signatures - will be necessary before the Education Board by law can consider the request.

"We are close. We are very close," Gray told the crowd about the possibility of a new district after some 40 years of work, six feasibility studies and one thwarted public election.

"In May we are going to go to the state Board of Education to give them an update on where we are," he said. "Our goal is to have all the signatures verified and ready to give to them in June."

Winston Simpson, a retired superintendent hired last year by planners for a new school district to update and expand earlier feasibility studies, proposed to the crowd that the 2013-14 school year be a planning year for a new district and that the new 100-square mile district be operational in the 2014-15 school year for more than 4,400 Jacksonville-area students.

The proposed school system would include 10 current schools and two vacant campuses. The operating schools are Jacksonville High, North Pulaski High and Jacksonville Middle School; Arnold Drive, Bayou Meto, Murrell Taylor, Pinewood, Tolleson and Warren Dupree elementaries; and the Homer Adkins Pre-kindergarten campus.

State officials have told the planners for the new district that their first step upon receiving a petition for an election will be to ask the federal judge presiding in the long-running Pulaski County school desegregation lawsuit to authorize the election, Gray said.

In 2003 a judge in the desegregation case canceled similar plans for an election on forming a Jacksonville district. That was in part because the judge was not consulted before the election plans and because he said the new district would hinder court-approved desegregation efforts in the Little Rock, North Little Rock and Pulaski County Special school districts.

Since then, the Little Rock and North Little Rock districts have been released from federal court supervision of their desegregation efforts, although both districts continue to participate with the Pulaski County Special district in magnet school and majority-to-minority interdistrict student transfer programs.

Simpson told the audience that Pulaski County Special district has been hindered in its efforts to achieve unitary status by the relatively poor condition of the school buildings, particularly in the Jacksonville area.

The detachment of the Jacksonville area from the Pulaski County Special School District will help the Pulaski County Special district achieve unitary status, Simpson said. He said the formation of a Jacksonville district won't hinder desegregation.

"The time is right," Simpson said.

Jacksonville planners have complied with state law requirements for forming a district, and state and Pulaski County Special district leaders have been supportive of the planning efforts, he said. Even the former School Board for the Pulaski County Special district, prior to the state takeover of the district and dissolution of the board, voted unanimously in favor of permitting the detachment.

Gray said the new district would comply with desegregation requirements of the Pulaski County Special district, including participation in magnet school and interdistrict transfer programs, until the federal court releases both the Pulaski County Special and a new district from court supervision.

Simpson presented the findings in his feasibility study - which is available at [ourowndistrict.com](http://ourowndistrict.com) - saying a new district would have the resources necessary to operate an "excellent" system. But he also said there would be some challenges.

New facilities that meet state standards and the aspirations of the community "will require substantial expenditure of funds," Simpson wrote in the report. "Some additional tax levy may be necessary."

The feasibility study gives different scenarios for reducing the number of schools to be used in a new district and upgrading the remaining campuses. The plans range in cost from \$63 million to \$91 million, but a new district would likely be eligible for significant state aid for construction, Simpson said.

The new district is projected to have about a 46.7 percent black enrollment.

The estimated amount of funding available per student in the new district would be about \$7,955 and in the remaining Pulaski County Special district, \$9,175, which would be an increase compared with the current \$8,843 per student for the district as it is now configured.

The possibility of having to pay higher property taxes for improved school buildings didn't faze Chev Ergle, a Jacksonville eye doctor who attended Tuesday's meeting.

"I think the people of Jacksonville are more than capable of providing funding for the schools," he said. "I think people haven't voted for millage increase in the past because all the money has been directed elsewhere. When I add up my own property taxes, how much I've paid and how much of the money has gone to the schools in this area, it's really a small amount."

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## **Transition to Teaching Grant Adds 8 School Districts, 2 Subject Areas (KARK, Channel 4)**

CONWAY, AR -- A \$2.3 million federal Partnership for Transition to Teaching grant has expanded to include eight additional school districts and two more subject areas.

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the Transition to Teaching federal grant to the University of Central Arkansas in 2011 to prepare math and science teachers for the North Little Rock and Little Rock school districts.

The grant now expands to the English and language arts subject areas. The additional partnership school districts are Carlisle School District, Dollarway School District, El Dorado Public Schools, Harrison School District, Pine Bluff School District, Watson Chapel School District, West Memphis School District, and White Hall School District.

"We are excited about the prospect of serving more school districts and students in different areas of the state of Arkansas. We are also looking forward to receiving funding applications from prospective English and Language Arts teachers," said Carolyn C. Williams, professor in the College of Education and principal investigator for the Partnership for Transition to Teaching grant.

The grant supports efforts to recruit mid-career professionals and recent graduates with degrees outside of education and then help these recruits become teachers through alternative certification routes. Teacher candidates enrolled in the 36-hour Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at UCA can receive up to \$5,000 in tuition.

Courses for the MAT program are offered primarily on-line. The deadline to apply for the Partnership for Transition to Teaching grant funds is May 1.

The 10 partnership school districts all report having at least 20 percent of families as living at or below the poverty line with less than two percent of teachers in the district not fully certified to teach in their subject area.

"We are struggling as a community and as a county and people are leaving the region," said Danny Hazelwood, Watson Chapel Superintendent. The district is located in the Arkansas Delta region with approximately 3,000 K-12 students. "I think with this assistance we will have a little better chance of filling positions when they do open."

The participating teacher candidates will earn preliminary teaching licensure and credentials in one year while working as university intern teachers in the 10 targeted partnership school districts. After earning the MAT using the grant funding, teachers are required to teach at least three years in high-need schools.

"We still believe that the teacher is the number one ingredient for success in the classroom," said Bob Watson, superintendent of the El Dorado School District. "We are delighted to be a part of this project in that math, science, English, and language arts are critical need areas. We have a great deal of difficulty in filling some of those positions." For more information about the Transition to Teaching program or the Master of Arts in Teaching, visit [uca.edu/MAT](http://uca.edu/MAT), email [transition@uca.edu](mailto:transition@uca.edu) or call 501-450-5443.

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## **Local Schools Monitor National School Safety Debate (KNWA, Fayetteville)**

**Video available at [http://nwahomepage.com/fulltextfox?nxd\\_id=417892](http://nwahomepage.com/fulltextfox?nxd_id=417892)**

Here in Northwest Arkansas, educators are keeping a close eye on the national school security debate. But how has safety changed since the Sandy Hook tragedy?

At schools here in Northwest Arkansas intruder drills just as frequent as fire drills and tornado drills.

Proof that student safety is on the forefront of administrators minds.

In Northwest Arkansas plans are in place.

"Every school in the district has a security plan that is carefully choreographed and vetted through the Fayetteville Police Department," says Alan Wilbourn with Fayetteville Public Schools.

Making sure our students are safe.

"Security is a number one priority and it's even more so given the events of last December."

Since the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary a sense of security is in the sights of schools.

"We continue to get police officers coming into our schools on a regular basis during the week unannounced come in a just walk around the schools. That is huge, that's positive, love it," says Bentonville Schools Superintendent Mike Poore.

The Bentonville School District making room in next year's budget to add even more school resource officers.

"If we could have a qualified school resource officer at every school I certainly would appreciate that."

But money matters and it's just not an option right now, so Bentonville looking for other ways to keep schools secure."

"One of the best ways to prevent mass shootings, if you look at the who the shooters are, is that they've felt disconnected felt disconnected within their own community sometimes with their families," says Poore.

And while school administrators are working on a local level, they're keeping an eye on national politics.

"All those things are kind of churning right now and it will be interesting to see what, if anything, that congress can do," says Poore.

Since this is such a politically charged issue, a lot of schools are just waiting to see what actually happens in Congress.

But Bentonville Superintendent Mike Poore tells KNWA arming volunteers is concerning and that a plan would have to be very well thought out for him to ever endorse any other guns on his school campuses.

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### **Local Schools React to NRA Proposal (KFSM/KXNW , Fort Smith)**

**Video available at <http://5newsonline.com/2013/04/02/local-schools-react-to-nra-proposal/>**

Former Arkansas Congressman Asa Hutchinson presented the National Rifle Association's suggestions to improve school safety in Washington D.C.

School officials are keeping a close eye on what's happening at the national level because if it became law it would have a direct affect.

The NRA's 225 page study recommends schools to train and arm at least one staff member.

Chris Weeks, an architecture drafting teacher at Bentonville High School, said guns in school is a topic on the minds of many educators.

"I don't want our schools to be a fearful situation," Weeks said.

Hutchinson recommends extensive training for the armed school official.

"Forty to 60 hours that is totally comprehensive then that is an appropriate resource that a school should be able to utilize," Hutchinson said.

Weeks said training is the key point.

"I don't think 40 hours is nearly enough," Weeks said. "I know our resource officers over the years have hundreds of hours."

Hutchinson believes an armed school official is a way to keep kids safe but Weeks said he doesn't feel comfortable with more guns on campus.

"I'm a teacher. I don't want to possibly endanger a student," Weeks said.

Administrators in Fayetteville said they are looking into the NRA proposal.

"We're paying attention to everything that's out there and filtering through all of it," Alan Wilbourn said.

Spokesperson Alan Wilbourn said the Fayetteville School District works with police and has emergency drills in place. The district has four school resource officers.

"Every one of those plans has been carefully choreographed through the Fayetteville Police Department. In fact they have drills at many of our campuses," Wilbourn said.

Another component of the NRA proposal is having 40 to 60 hours of training for school resource officers.

Steve Vera is one of three resource officers in Bentonville Public Schools. He said he always welcomes training and additional officers.

"Hopefully there are federal grants that are going to come out that will help departments be able to put school resource officers in all the schools," Vera said.

Vera said he's received about 120 hours of training in his twelve years in the district.

"Nothing is a required training, but it is training that's available and we try to go to as many of those classes," Vera said.

Vera teaches an active shooter course each summer with student volunteers as hostages.

"We actually have students that are running out in the hallways or injured in the hallways to try to give our officers a realistic view of going into an active shooter scenario," Vera said.

The Bentonville School District will replace its fourth resource officers after he became a Detective and will add a fifth officer by the end of the school year.

The NRA also proposes an online tool schools can use to assess their safety as well as a pilot program that identifies students who are potential threats or need mental health help.

Hutchinson is one of three announced candidates for Arkansas governor. The others are Republican Curtis Coleman and Democrat Bill Halter.

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## **Manila School District gets excellent audit report (Northeast Town Crier)**

Manila School District Superintendent Pam Castor distributed copies of the 2012 audit report to council members at the March meeting held Thursday evening. She said she was pleased with the audit with no findings.

"It was a good audit," Castor said.

Board members present were President Danny Robbins, Brandon Veatch, Johnny McCain, Tommy Wagner, Tracey Reinhart, and Tony Crowell. Jeremy Jackson was not present.



Superintendent Castor read a resolution to conduct business with Knockout Graphics, as Coach Bill Taylor has declared he is a part-time salesman for the company.

The board voted unanimously to allow a transfer from BIC for Haley Harvey, 6, and Alisha Harvey, pre-k.

The board went into executive session reconvening at 7:25 p.m.

The board approved renewal of the licensed staff list submitted by Superintendent Castor.

The board voted unanimously, on the recommendation of Superintendent Castor, of the termination of custodian Alice Benham effective immediately.

The board voted to hire Sandra Brown as full time custodian.

The board accepted the resignation of Melissa Snow as assistant softball coach.

Spring sports assignments were approved with Coach Bill Taylor as baseball coach assisted by Coach Trent Floyd; Coach Mark Manchester as softball coach assisted by Coach John Deaton; and Track Coach Jerry Castor assisted by Coach Tim Bassing and Coach Jordan Wise.

The board accepted the resignation of Dale Case, elementary principal, as of June 30. President Robbins read a letter from Mr. Case thanking the board for the opportunity to work in Manila. Mr. Case has accepted a position in the Jonesboro area.

"It has been an honor to serve here," Mr. Case said. "You have a great district and staff."

The board wished Mr. Case the best and thanked him for his time in Manila.

The board accepted the resignation of cafeteria worker Paula Bell as of April 5.

Mrs. Castor distributed a policy update package on model policies for the board members to review and discuss at the next meeting.

In the administrative reports Ms. Castor recognized high school teacher Cindy Bunch for being chosen as a reader for the AP Chemistry exam.

"This has been a four year process and is quite an honor," Castor said. She has also been accepted to work in the Arkansas STRIVE program which involves summer long research and curriculum development in science."

Mrs. Castor also recognized the high school quiz bowl team for winning second place in regional tournament. They will be competing in the state tournament the first of April.

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## **New supt. to visit April 8 (Ashley County Observer)**

Dr. Barbara Wood said the transition from the tenure of interim Crossett School District superintendent Tommy Tyler to her own will be a smooth one.

Dr. Wood, hired last week by the Crossett School Board, will officially assume her duties July 1, after she completes her current contract as interim superintendent with the Waldron School District.

She said a desire to return to south Arkansas and family connections to Crossett were among the reasons she sought the local school position.

"I have a special interest in Crossett," Dr. Wood said. "I spent a lot of my childhood summers in Crossett with my aunts and uncles."

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## **School choice on group's agenda (Log Cabin Democrat, Cownay)**

The Faulkner County Tea Party will host a forum on school choice at the group's general meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at the McGee Center, 3800 College Ave.

Several bills are being introduced in the Arkansas Legislature that are receiving national attention and have the potential to make major changes in Arkansas education. Guests will lead discussion on school choice, education reform and current legislation. They will share about the A+ Arkansas Campaign which is a coalition of concerned parents, educators and community leaders who want accountability in schools and who want to improve opportunities for Arkansas' youth.

The guest speakers include Luke Gordy and Laurie Lee. Gordy is the Executive Director of Arkansans for Education Reform Foundation, which advances and supports education reform. He is a two-term Chairman of the Arkansas State Board of Education. He has a 22-year career in banking. He is the former chair and current member of the Board of Governors of REL-Southwest, one of the nation's 10 regional education research laboratories. He serves on many education boards in Arkansas and serves as chair of the Education Committee for the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce and on the executive committee of Economic Arkansas.

Lee is a partner at Southern Meridian with more than 20 years of business experience and grassroots activism in Arkansas politics. Recently, she served as Grassroots Director for Americans for Prosperity, and she was a Field Representative for American Majority. She was responsible for training thousands of Arkansans on how to engage in the political arena.

She has been instrumental in helping build grassroots organizations all across Arkansas. She is the Executive Director of the Arkansas of The Arkansas Reform Alliance.

The forum is open to everyone. Guests will take questions from the audience. A meet and greet with light refreshments will follow the meeting.

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## **School-choice group rallies for scholarship bill (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

The Arkansas Parents for School Choice rallied behind House Bill 1897 at the state Capitol Rotunda on Tuesday morning, before the bill failed in a House education committee meeting later in the day.

An official at the Capitol said the bill failed in a voice vote and was referred to an interim study.

The bill would have created a scholarship program that would allow parents to choose whether their children attend public or private school.

Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville, who sponsored the legislation, spoke briefly to supporters at the rally.

Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville, who sponsored the legislation, spoke briefly before the room of supporters.

Alexander said school choice was one of the most important issues before the state.

"The voice of parents has been replaced by experts," Alexander said. "But I believe when you're speaking to a parent, you're speaking to the leading expert on that particular child."

Alexander said that since tax dollars fund public schools, parents should have the right to choose how their money is spent, and what school their children attend.

The Arkansas Parents for School Choice group said in a news release Monday that it believes parents in Arkansas should be able to choose among public, charter, magnet, alternative and private schools, along with the option of home schooling.

Experts have debated the effectiveness of some of the options, including charter schools. A 2009 study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University showed that Arkansas was in the top five states that saw higher learning in charter schools than would have occurred in public schools.

The study also concluded that at a nationwide level, charter schools were not performing better than public schools.

After the short rally, several parents and children made their way to the education committee meeting.

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## **Buffalo Island School Board accepts transfers, resignations (Northeast Arkansas Town Crier)**

All school board members were present for the March 25 Buffalo Island Central School Board meeting.

Following the approval of the minutes and financial statement review,

Buffalo Island Central School Board voted unanimously to adopt the new Arkansas Teacher Excellence and Support System for evaluations beginning the 2013-14 school year when the board met March 25.

The board hired Tammy Cloninger as custodian for the West elementary with a 7-0 vote.

The board voted unanimously to accept the resignations of Nancy Sills, speech therapy; Erin Clay, speech therapy (part-time), Steve Brummett, secondary math; Kane Bradley, vocal music; and Garrett Eoff, boys basketball coach (basketball only).

Transfers were approved with Ellen Cable moving from junior high math to senior high math; Coach Eoff from boys basketball to junior high math (will continue to coach high school baseball and summer baseball).

The board voted unanimously to renew all certified and classified contracts for the 2013-14 school year with the following exceptions: Title I aides; cooks; special need aides; and bus route drivers. These contracts will be considered at the April board meeting.

The board moved to hire all personnel necessary to staff summer school, credit recovery, and ACT boot camp program.

Summer school staff will include half days on the East and West campus, Tina Fowler, Erin Clay, Karen McClelland, and Karalee Gibson. On the East campus, Tonya Boyd, Faith Rolland, Kathryn Austin, Debbie King, Lisa Turner, RoseMary Clester and Janie Ibanez-Migrant. On the West campus Janie Sparkman, Amber Crabtree, Regina Welch, Patty Qualls, Terrie Selby, Stacey Qualls, Phyllis Moxley-Migrant; CPEP teacher Brummett, Smith and Cornish; Credit Recovery, Olive and Cable.

The board voted to authorize the superintendent to take any corrective action necessary to comply with the most recent legislative audit.

Board members toured the main facilities on each campus to consider building security concerns and solutions prior to the scheduled board meeting.

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## **Cedarville High School Evacuated After Bomb Threat (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)**

Investigators deemed Cedarville High School and Middle School safe after the buildings were evacuated for nearly three hours Tuesday because of an apparent bomb threat found written on a bathroom wall at the high school.

The students were taken to two gyms at the elementary school after the note was found about 11 a.m., according to a news release from Dan Foreman, superintendent of Cedarville Public Schools. The school notified parents via phone call that they could pick up their children if they wished.

About 2 p.m., the students were allowed to return to the buildings and classes resumed as normal, the release states.

“Students and faculty safety is our top priority,” Foreman stated. “We have to take a threat as serious. We will not allow the safety of our students to be in jeopardy.”

Officer Rhonda Wheeler of the Cedarville Police Department said some parents picked up their children from school, but most remained.

Arkansas State Police, Crawford County Sheriff’s deputies and Cedarville police responded to the school, Wheeler said. Firefighters and EMS were on standby.

Foreman thanked the Cedarville Police Department and Crawford County Sheriff’s Department for their quick response.

Foreman stated in the release that the individual or individuals responsible for the threat would be “prosecuted to the limits of the law,” although a school official said she did not know if authorities had obtained a suspect.

Tuesday’s threat and evacuation marked the fifth similar incident at Crawford County schools. Van Buren High School was evacuated with classes canceled March 13. A Van Buren High School student was arrested March 14 when he was caught leaving a similar message on a bathroom wall at the school. A “copycat” threat occurred at Alma High School also on March 14, leading to the arrest of 18-year-old Alma High School student Kevin Ray Newton.

On March 15, Greenwood police arrested a 10-year-old boy after he allegedly threatened to blow up Westwood Elementary School.

On March 25, Northridge Middle School was briefly evacuated and on March 27, Van Buren High School was once again evacuated.